

# Reading Zone 7

Read the next passage, pre-reading subheadings and the questions. You can check your answers to the multiple-choice questions on page 243.

## THE DUTCH IN INDONESIA

The saga of the Dutch in Indonesia began in 1596, when four small Dutch vessels led by the incompetent and arrogant Cornelius de Houtman anchored in the roads of Banten, then the largest pepper port in the archipelago. Repeatedly blown off course and racked by disease and dissension, the Houtman expedition had been a disaster from the start. In Banten, the sea-weary Dutch crew went on a drinking binge and had to be chased back to their ships by order of an angry prince, who then refused to do business with such unruly *farang*. Hopping from port to port down the north coast of Java, de Houtman wisely confined his sailors to their ships and managed to purchase some spices. But on arriving in Bali, the entire crew jumped ship and it was some months before de Houtman could muster a quorum for returning to voyage.

Arriving back in Holland in 1597 after an absence of two years, with only three lightly laden ships and a third of their crew, the de Houtman voyage was nonetheless hailed as a success. So dear were spices in Europe at this time, that the sale of the meager cargoes sufficed to cover all expenses and even produced a modest profit for the investors! This touched off a veritable fever of speculation in Dutch commercial circles, and in the following year five consortiums dispatched a total of 22 ships to the Indies.

### The Dutch East India Company

The Netherlands was at this time rapidly becoming the commercial centre of Northern Europe. Since the fifteenth century, ports of the two Dutch coastal provinces, Holland and Zeeland, had served as entrepôts for goods shipped to Germany and the Baltic states. Many Dutch merchants

grew wealthy on this carrying trade, and following the outbreak of war with Spain in 1568, they began to expand their shipping fleets rapidly, so that by the 1590s they were trading directly with Levant and Brazil.

Thus when a Dutchman published his itinerary to the East Indies in 1595–1596, it occasioned the immediate dispatch of the de Houtman and later expeditions. Indeed, so keen was the interest in direct trade with the Indies, that all Dutch traders soon came to recognize the need for cooperation—to minimize competition and maximize profits. In 1602, therefore, they formed the United Dutch East India Company (known by its Dutch initials VOC), one of the first joint-stock corporations in history. It was capitalized at more than six million guilders and empowered by the states-general to negotiate treaties, raise armies, build fortresses, and wage war on behalf of the Netherlands in Asia.

The VOC's whole purpose and philosophy can be summed up in a single word—monopoly. Like the Portuguese before them, the Dutch dreamed of securing absolute control of the East Indies spice trade, which traditionally had passed through many Muslim and Mediterranean hands. The profits from such a trade were potentially enormous, in the order of several thousand percent.

In its early years, the VOC met with only limited success. Several trading posts were opened, and Ambon was taken from the Portuguese (in 1605), but Spanish and English, not to mention Muslim, competition kept spice prices high in Indonesia and low in Europe. Then in 1614, a young accountant by the name of Jan Pietieszoon Coen convinced the directors that only a more forceful policy would make the company profitable. Coen was given command of VOC operations, and promptly embarked on a series of military adventures that were to set the pattern for Dutch behavior in the region.

## The Founding of Batavia

Coen's first step was to establish a permanent headquarters at Jayakarta on the northwestern coast of Java, close to the pepper-producing parts of Sumatra and the strategic Sunda Straits. In 1618, he sought and received permission from Prince Wijayakrama of Jayakarta to expand the existing Dutch post, and proceeded to throw up a stone barricade mounted with cannon. The prince protested that fortifications were not provided for in their agreement and Coen responded by bombarding the palace, thereby reducing it to rubble. A siege of the fledgling Dutch fortress ensued, in which the powerful Bantenese and a recently arrived English fleet joined the Jayakartans. Coen was not so easily beaten, however (his motto: "Never Despair!"), and escaped to Amboyon leaving a handful of his men in defense of the fort and its valuable contents.

Five months later, Coen returned to discover his men still in possession of their post. Though outnumbered 30-to-1 they had rather unwittingly played one foe against another by acceding to any and all demands, but were never actually required to surrender their position due to the mutual suspicion and timidity of the three attacking parties. Coen set his adversaries to flight in a series of dramatic attacks, undertaken with a small force of 1,000 men that included several score of fearsome Japanese mercenaries. The town of Jayakarta was razed to the ground and construction of a new Dutch town begun, eventually to include canals, drawbridges, docks, warehouses, barracks, a central square, a city hall, and a church—all protected by a high stone wall and a moat—a copy, in short, of Amsterdam itself.

The only sour note in the proceedings was struck by the revelation that during the darkest days of the siege, many of the Dutch defenders had behaved themselves in a most unseemly manner—drinking, singing, and fornicating for several nights in succession. Worst of all, they had broken open the company storehouse and divided the contents up amongst themselves. Coen, a strict disciplinarian, ordered the immediate execution of those involved, and memories of the infamous siege soon faded—save one. The defenders had dubbed their fortress "Batavia," and the new name stuck.

Coen's next step was to secure control of the five tiny nutmeg- and mace-producing Banda Islands. In 1621, he led an expeditionary force there and within a few weeks rounded up and killed most of the 15,000 inhabitants on the island. Three of the islands were then transformed into spice plantations managed by Dutch colonists and worked by slaves.

In the years that followed, the Dutch gradually tightened their grip on the spice trade. From their base at Ambon, they attempted to "negotiate" a monopoly in cloves with the rulers of Ternaate and Tidore. But "leakages" continued to occur. Finally, in 1649, the Dutch began a series of yearly sweeps of the entire area. The infamous *hongji* (war-fleet) expeditions defended islands other than Ambon and Ceram, where the Dutch were firmly established. So successful were these expeditions, that half of the islanders starved for lack of trade, and the remaining half were reduced to abject poverty.

Still the smuggling of cloves and clove trees continued. Traders obtained these and other goods at the new Islamic port of Makassar, in southern Sulawesi. The Dutch repeatedly blockaded Makassar and imposed treaties theoretically barring the Makassarese from trading with other nations, but were unable for many years to enforce them. Finally, in 1669, following three years of bitter and bloody fighting, the Makassarese surrendered to superior Dutch and Buginese forces. The Dutch now placed their Bugis ally, Aarung Palakka, in charge of Makassar. The bloodletting did not stop here, however, for Arung Palakka embarked on a reign of terror to extend his control over all of southern Sulawesi.

### **The Dutch in Java**

By such nefarious means the Dutch had achieved effective control of the eastern archipelago and its lucrative spice trade by the end of the seventeenth century. In the western half of the archipelago, however, they became increasingly embroiled in fruitless intrigues and wars, particularly on Java. This came about largely because the Dutch presence at Batavia disturbed a delicate balance of power on Java.

1. Cornelius de Houtman could be described as
  - (A) a daring adventurer
  - (B) the father of the spice trade
  - (C) the first casualty of the Dutch in Indonesia
  - (D) an ineffective commandant
  - (E) an inspirational leader
  
2. The Dutch East India Company at first encountered
  - (A) enormous success
  - (B) limited success
  - (C) limited failure
  - (D) enormous failure
  - (E) horrendous weather
  
3. The Dutch control of the spice trade in Java was achieved through
  - (A) diplomatic negotiation
  - (B) military conquest
  - (C) sordid alliances
  - (D) commerce and trade
  - (E) correspondence and requisition
  
4. During the siege of Coen's position, his soldiers behaved
  - (A) with military decorum
  - (B) with vengeance and anger
  - (C) with honor and discipline
  - (D) with dipsomaniac fervor
  - (E) until the fourth month of the siege
  
5. It can be inferred from the passage that the word "farang" means
  - (A) friends
  - (B) foreigners
  - (C) Dutchmen
  - (D) drunkards
  - (E) sailors